This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1 - 32. (canceled)

33.   (previously presented) A system for validating multiple alternative execution plans for a single database query, comprising:

a search engine responsive to the query for constructing a data structure containing a plurality of groups each including a number of alternative operators, at least some of the operators having pointers to one or more different ones of the groups;

a ranking module for ranking the operators in the groups and for unranking them so as to construct a plurality of different execution plans for the query, wherein each execution plan is assigned a unique global rank, based on operator rank data, that identifies one respective execution plan from all other possible execution plans; and

a validation module for validating the execution plans from the ranking module.

34.   (original) The system of claim 33 where the data structure is a table.

35.   (original) The system of claim 33 further including a specification for specifying a number of different plans to be constructed.

36.   (original) The system of claim 33 further including a directory containing locations of the groups and operators within the data structure containing the groups.

37.   (canceled)

38.   (previously presented) The system of claim 36 where the directory includes

rank data for each group representing a number of alternative plans associated with that

group.

39-43.   (canceled)